As a change agent, how can you help your clients to change their behavior more effectively and sustain that behavior?

By: Sameh Gabr, CMC

To achieve and sustain behavioral change it is crucial to recognize, understand and accept the following four impetuses to change.

First, most people have three sets of behavior a) behavior they want to keep; b) behavior they want to change and can; c) behavior they want to change but cannot. These behavior fits into two categories (Fig. 1) "Who We Are," and "What We Are," which are the main driver behind our behavior and our limitations to change.

Second, there is a need for a common vocabulary for communicating to others. A good model is Edward de Bono's the "Six Thinking Hat" (de Bono, 1985) which include the Red Hat that address the use and the expression of gut feel/intuition in a business environment.

Third, the process by which we acquire knowledge and apply it (knowledge and skills' transfer). In my experience I have seen people who have the knowledge but fewer have been able to put it into use. This transfer is when the real learning happens, and is demonstrated in (Fig. 2) "The Learning Cycle."

Finally, the emotional and mental state of both the change agent and his client contribute to the success of achieving and sustaining change. "The Emotional Cycle of Change" (Fig. 3) and "The Five Domains of Emotional Intelligence" will address this contribution.

THE THREE SETS OF BEHAVIOR

One of the ways to reduce resistance when managing change is to recognize the real underlying reasons for resistance to change. Thus, we will be able to develop and implement the appropriate strategies that will help to overcome that resistance.

It is useful to look at ourselves, to examine the process we go through in dealing with and adopting change in order to recognize some of these reasons. I am not suggesting that we all deal with change in the same manner. However, my personal and consulting experience has led me to believe that those who have gone through the process of self-examination have a better understanding of some of the real issues underlying resistance to change, and are in a better position to reduce such resistance.

Most of us have not **consciously** examined the three sets of behavior: what we want to keep, and why; what we want to change, and can, and why; and what we want to change but cannot, and why.

Going through that exercise myself, which was neither easy nor short, I discovered that the set of behavior ***I wanted to change but I could not*** fell into the "Who We Are" category, body of ourselves, (Fig. 1). It consists of core elements acquired from the day we were born till the age of five. These elements include our religious

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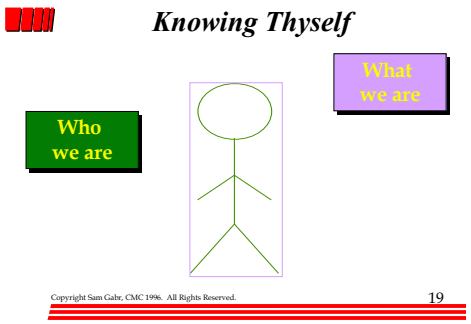
beliefs, moral values, and cultural habits/standards (the way we do things).



The frequency of changing these elements, i.e. religious beliefs, cultural habits is usually low, its impact is high, and usually we feel a high level of discomfort during the change process.

Also, 80% of behavior ***I wanted to change and I was able to*** fell into the "What We Are" category, the frame around the human skeleton, (Fig. 1). It consists of elements acquired from @ age five till we die. These elements include the languages we speak and might learn in the future; education we have acquired and might acquire in the future; and preferences concerning food, music, sports, clothes, places to go, etc..

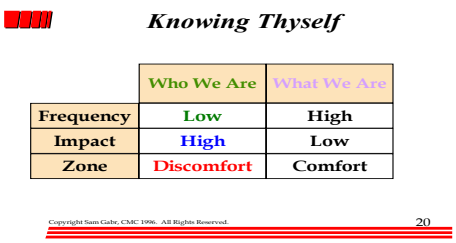
The frequency of changing the elements of "What We Are" is usually higher than "Who We Are," its impact is lower, and usually we do feel a low level of discomfort during the change process. Only 20% of this fall into the "What We Are" category.

The set of behavior ***I wanted to keep***, is divided between both categories, "Who We Are" and "What We Are." This set consists of elements that makes us feel satisfied or relieved from an anxiety or a pain. It consists of a combination of the elements of both categories, Who We are (religious beliefs, moral values, cultural habits) and What We Are (languages, education, preferences concerning food, music, sports, etc.)

I am strong believer that not a single human being will consciously or unconsciously do something with no benefit to himself, even if the recipient is the clear beneficiary. If you have any doubts, choose one of your actions where you felt there was no benefit for yourself. Then, ask yourself how you would have felt if you had not done it?" You will find that either you would have missed a certain satisfaction or you would not have experienced relief from anxiety or pain. We do things because they make us feel satisfied about ourselves or relieved from an anxiety or pain. Thus, the change agent has to be able to see clearly "what is in it" for the people he is trying to coach as well as for himself.

Some of the resistance that change agents face when assisting their clients would fall into either the "Who We Are" or "What We Are" category. Identifying the category, and the driver behind such resistance will help change agents to address the nature and the degree of the resistance.

The three sets of behavior, whether consciously or unconsciously, have driven our behavior in the past and can continue to drive it now and for the future, unless we uncover and start addressing them.



It is important to note that each of us has positive values that drive our behavior, but under certain circumstances these values disappear, and instead undesired values surface and take charge. In such cases the change agent needs to identify his/her clients' positive values and appeal to them.

Such appeal will not always be successful. This is when change agents, depending on their mandate, might follow some or a combination of the following actions to achieve change: a) mobilize peers to create peer pressure, b) use the threat of job security, c) advise such people to resign, d) fire such people, e) submit a recommendation to top management to fire such people, and finally f) ignore such people hoping they will adopt change at a later stage or the cultural pressure will push them to leave the organization.

By examining your own three sets of behavior, you as a change agent will be able to guide others effectively in changing their behavior, and in adapting to their new changing environment.

Common Vocabulary for Communicating to Others

As change agents we need to find, then learn a common vocabulary that will enable us to communicate to others and overcome the difficulties of understanding the different communication styles of participants.

A good model is Edward de Bono's "Six Thinking Hats." The broad thinking hat role is broken down to six different *character roles,* represented by six different colored thinking hats. Thinking now begins to flow from the *acted parts, six-character roles, and not from the ego.* In the end, the ego can choose a preferred route, because the main restriction on thinking is ego defense, which is responsible for most practical faults of thinking (de Bono, 1985).

In practice, the hats are always referred to by their color and never by their function. The functions of the six color hats are as follows:

The white Hat is neutral and objective. It is concerned with objective facts and figures (checked and unchecked belief) related to the subject matter.

The Red Hat suggests anger and emotions. It is concerned with an emotional view and gut feeling (intuition) related to the subject matter.

The Black Hat is gloomy and negative. It is concerned with the negative (disadvantageous) aspects of the subject matter.

The Yellow Hat is sunny and positive. It is concerned with the positive (advantageous) aspects of the subject matter.

The Green Hat suggests fertility and growth. The grass is green. It is concerned with creativity and new ideas related to the subject matter.

The Blue Hat is cool, and it is also the color of the sky, which is above everything. It is concerned with control of the organization, the thinking process and the use of the thinking hats.

Why is the "Six Thinking Hats" a good model?

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As de Bono said, these different styles define people's roles. It also directs attention to six different aspects, instead of one aspect only resulting from the ego. In addition, the symbolism of the six different hats provides a very convenient way of asking someone (including yourself) to switch gears without embarrassment (de Bono, 1985). Furthermore, it establishes a framework when discussing issues with others.

Including the Red Hat (gut feel/intuition) among the other hats is one of the very important features of this model. We usually only express our gut feeling/intuition in our personal lives, but it is often considered taboo to do the same in a business environment. Most of us tend to rationalize our gut feel in an attempt to persuade others, because it is seen as illogical and unacceptable.

It is crucial to realize and acknowledge that our gut feel/intuition is our *natural intelligence system*. To maximize our benefits from this system, we need to encourage people in the workplace to start expressing their gut feel and support them during the process.

To master relying on your gut feel/intuition is like excelling in any sport. You cannot be a champion without practicing. *Intuition is like a muscle, it will die if you do not use it.* To listen to your gut feel when the logic or the facts tell you otherwise, is not an easy act. You need to take some risk to build confidence and trust in your instincts. This requires courage, time and a supporting environment. Once you start practicing listening to your gut feel/intuition and seeing the outcome, you will gain more confidence in your intuition, and your ability to correctly recognize and interpret these messages will increase enormously.

PROCESS OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND APPLYING IT

The change agent, in assisting others, plays the role of a coach. His ultimate goal is achieving the organization's objectives through its people and sustaining any change required. This involves transfer of knowledge and skills (practical application of knowledge). The latter is a more difficult task and requires more time, support, and tact.

Learning is a double loop. It includes *the habit of learning, and learning to solve a particular problem* (Handy, 1990).

The habit of learning is the preparation to be able to solve particular problems. It is the habit of going full circle in what I call "The Learning Cycle" (Fig. 2), and experiencing it and the benefits that it provides. The habit of learning is the initiative you take to acquire the necessary knowledge in your field and other related fields. I strongly believe that you can only develop the habit of learning when you try to acquire and retain knowledge about a field that you have interest in and/or passion for.

Learning to solve a particular problem. This occurs when you are dealing with real not hypothetical problems, whether work related or personal, and whether you are solving a problem on your own or with external help.

"The Theory of Learning" is a wheel divided into four parts: questions, theories, testing and reflections (Handy, 1990). I have adapted this theory into "The Learning Cycle" that consists of five stages: the four Ws &

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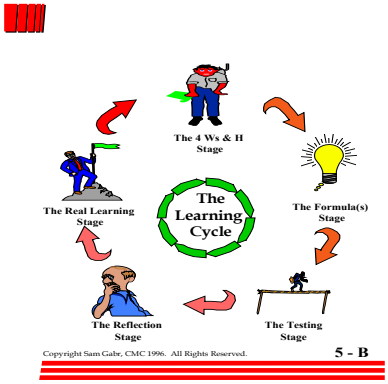
H stage, the formula(s) stage, the testing stage, the reflection stage, and the real learning stage. I felt the need to add "the real learning stage," which is the stage at which you act upon your reflections (reflections materialize into action).

To solve a particular problem, you need to go through the first three stages of the learning cycle. However, at the end of the third stage you have solved the problem but you might not have understood why your solution has worked and what improvements are needed to be able to apply your solution to other related problems.


The 4 Ws & H Stage
The Formula(s) Stage
The Testing Stage
The Reflection Stage
The Real Learning Stage
The Learning Cycle
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1. The 4 Ws & H Stage

It is the why, what, when, where and how stage, in which you are faced with a problem and try to find answers to all or some of the 4 Ws and & H. Some people will be stuck and stop at this stage, others will proceed to the next stage.

2. The Formula(s) Stage

In this stage, you start formulating ideas and organizing them to create a solution to the problem in hand. Some people will develop only one idea, others will develop more. At this stage you are uncertain whether the formula you have developed, will fly or flunk. Like the previous stage, some people will stop and will not proceed to the next stage, because of past rejection or lack of support, or they are afraid of failure due to lack of self-confidence.

3. The Testing Stage

After you have developed your formula(s), you start testing them to see the results of your creation. If it does not fly, some people will give up on themselves, while others will continue developing new formula(s) and testing them till one or more fly.

At this stage, as you may know, you are transforming the knowledge learned into skills, i.e., you are applying your knowledge to a real problem.

After you have been successful, some people will stop at this stage content with having solved the problem (by trial and error, or by the help of external resource) but not really knowing why it worked. They are the ones who have no questions and seek no answers, they will not voluntarily really learn or change. While others will proceed to the next stage. (Handy, 1985)

4. The Reflection Stage

It is the stage when you try to understand why your formula worked; if it is possible to improve it; and if you can adapt it to solve other problems. This stage is crucial to increasing our learning and our wide repertoire of skills.

5. The Real Learning Stage

It is the stage in which you start improving your formula and adapting it to solve other problems. It is the stage in which the Learning Cycle is complete, where new skills have been acquired and put into practice/use. However, we don't go through the whole cycle most of the time.

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I have used the term "stage" because while you are learning, you are being watched by those around you, as if you are on stage playing act in a play. Some are talking about you, setting their expectations on how you will perform. You, yourself, might be listening to what they say, and you are concerned whether you will be able to meet their expectations. Not all of us will show our fear of failure due to our ego's defenses; however, the play is not over till you or the problem disappear.

One of the paradoxes of life is that the solution of today's problem soon becomes tomorrow's problem. This is why after you have been through the Learning Cycle, whether you went through all stages or stopped at any of them, you will end back at the first stage, the "four Ws and H stage."

One of the problems that organizations are facing today, is they expect their staff apply successfully, from day one, what they have learned in a training course. It seems that managers forget how they learned the skills they possess today!

A six-year study of managers at Honeywell Corp. in 1985 found that *80% of what their managers learned was learned on the job, not in a classroom*.

As you may know, taking a seminar or reading a book about negotiation will not make you a good negotiator unless you were born with this talent. It is through practicing negotiation on your own, or with the guidance of an experienced negotiator (coach/mentor) that you become a better negotiator. The latter approach which includes trial and error will speed your learning more than the first.

Understanding that process will help the change agent to negotiate, with the senior management of both his employer and the client, a realistic time frame to achieve objectives and to provide support to those who bear the responsibility of adopting and implementing the change required.

It is important to note that practice is the key to any improvement whether it relates to human behavior or technical issues. However, behavioral change takes longer to master. I doubt that we can ***consistently*** succeed in coaching others to change their behavior. That doubt is due to several reasons including lack of top management support to enforce change when behavior falls in the "I cannot change" and/or "I do not want to change" sets, and the lack of the appropriate mental and emotional state of either or both the change agent and his client.

THE EMOTIONAL AND THE MENTAL STATE

Feelings have no place in business, as one senior executive told me once when I asked him what one of his colleagues felt about a certain decision. Denying feelings in the workplace assumes that we are dealing with machines not human beings. Machines also need to be maintained to ensure a lasting productivity!

Daniel Goleman, a psychologist, stated that in addition to IQ there is also the Emotional Intelligence which is a major influence on our behavior. He also referred to Peter Salovey, a psychologist, who identified the five main domains of Emotional Intelligence as: knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others and handling relations (Goleman, 1995).

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1. Knowing one's emotions. Self-awareness- recognizing a feeling as it happens - is the keystone of emotional intelligence.

2. Managing emotions. Handling feelings so they are appropriate, is an ability that is built on self-awareness.

3. Motivating oneself. Emotional self-control, delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness, underlies accomplishment of every sort.

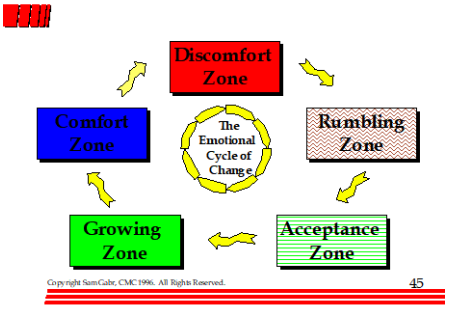
4. Recognizing emotions in others. Empathy is another ability that builds on emotional self-awareness. People who are more empathic are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want.

5. Handling relationships. It is in large part the skill of managing emotions in others.

These are the abilities that underpin popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness.

For the change agent to coach his clients successfully, he needs to understand the five domains of emotional intelligence in order to sense and read the person he is trying to guide. He should approach his client when the latter is in a state that will ensure acceptance of such guidance, otherwise the person will not accept the guidance, and even if he accepts it, it will be superficial, and no knowledge transfer will takes place. The state of acceptance guidance varies from person to person and for the same person from time to time.

As we all know, change brings discomfort to those involved in it, including the people who manage it, and the people who adopt the change. To understand the emotions involved, we might need to look at the "Emotional Cycle of Change". It consists of five zones, the Discomfort Zone, the Rumbling Zone, the Acceptance Zone, The Growing Zone, and finally the Comfort zone.



We don't go through the whole cycle most of the time. The time spent at each zone in the cycle varies from one person to another, and for the same person depending on how critical is the event to that the person.

1. The Discomfort Zone. It is the zone when a person starts to feel discomfort due to his perception of an event that took place, e.g. something he heard, saw, observed, or affected him physically. It could be work related or personal. I would like to emphasize the discomfort from people's interactions in organizations. In this zone, the person starts creating "stories" (their perception) of what happened, what they might need to do, if any, to relieve such anxiety or pain, and the implications of his actions.

2. The Rumbling Zone. In this zone, the person has neither accepted nor rejected the event. He is undecided. It is the zone of fear of uncertainty. If the person doesn't move out of this zone to the Acceptance Zone, he will eventually continue experiencing anxiety, and shuttling between the Discomfort and the Rumbling Zone, or residing in the Discomfort Zone.

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3. The Acceptance Zone. It is the zone when the person recognizes and accepts the event that took place, and possibly his contribution to such event. Then, he starts actively to develop strategies and action plans to remove or reduce the negative implications of such event, hoping to go through the Growing zone and ultimately to the Comfort zone.

4. The Growing Zone. It is the zone when the person consciously grows emotionally due to his acceptance of the event and its implications, both the negative and the positive. The person, in this zone, will face a difficult, painful, but also rewarding time due to the learning that has taken place.

5. The Comfort Zone. In this zone, the person has achieved most or all the changes required, and was able to see the benefits gained from the change process.

In conclusion, to guide others through change and effectively sustain it, we need to identify our clients' values and perceptions and the right time to approach them. Then, appeal to the positive values they possess and coach them to focus on these values using a common communication language. That will create a desire to acquire the new behavior required because it makes them feel good about themselves. Then, enforce such behavior by acknowledging the improvement they have achieved when it occurs.

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